

Making a 'Home'
Internal Displacements and Resettlement Processes in Sri Lanka 2002-2006

Shantha Wanninayake

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Abstract

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This study explores the process of internal displacement, settlement, return and resettlement in threatened villages in North and North-Central Sri Lanka during the ceasefire period between 2002 and 2006. The thesis investigates the diverse factors that affected internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their decision to stay in the host communities as well as their unwillingness to return to their original villages following the ceasefire agreement. The study has two main aims: The first is to understand the factors that attracted the IDPs to remain in the host communities. The second is to understand the IDPs' practical situation in the original villages compared with the host communities. Within this context, the thesis examines the nature of the IDPs' socioeconomic and political relationships with the host communities as well as the obstacles encountered when they resettle in their original villages.

To explore this central question, this research examines three main factors: social relationships, economic relationships, and (in)security situations. The thesis explores how IDPs built social relationships, economic relations, and livelihoods, and their security amidst host communities as well as in their original villages. The thesis establishes how these social, economic, and (in)security factors affected the IDPs' attraction to the host community, as well as how the factors operated as obstacles for IDPs to return to their original villages.

For its empirical evidence, the thesis is based on qualitative methods, and data for the research have been collected using primary as well as secondary sources. The qualitative data were collected mainly through interviews, including long interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Secondary sources have been used to help interpret the primary data. The study areas lie within the districts of Anuradhapura and Vavuniya. Six village locations were selected as host communities for examination, and the northern part of Anuradhapura and the southern part of Vavuniya district were considered as the original villages.

The research finds that there is no one single reason that affected the decision to remain or to return, but rather a combination of several key factors. For example, accessibility of land for cultivation and residence are some of the main economic reasons for IDPs to return or remain. Social relationships and life (in)security situations affect the IDPs' decision to find a place where they can stay with safety. In addition, the infrastructural facilities within the host community/area and the original villages have an impact on the decision to remain or to return.

Theoretically and conceptually, the research contributes to building up a new conceptual framework/model of social relationships, livelihood strategies, and security perceptions by using existing literature and new practical knowledge. The conceptual framework contributes to understanding matters pertaining to the field of displacement, settlement, and return and resettlement process in Sri Lanka. Empirically, the thesis undertakes a systematic data collection of social, economic, and (in)security factors. This thesis illustrates that the displacements and their settlements show both marginalization and innovation between both types of people: the IDPs and the people in the host communities.

Keywords: IDPs, host community, displacement, settlement, return, resettlement, social relationship, economic relationship, (in)security, integration, obstacle, threatened village